

The Lure of Artificial

Catching fish on artificials can be a challenge, but it makes good conservation sense, especially for catch and release fishing.

The reasons people enjoy fishing are as varied as the different techniques they employ to catch various species. Some people fish only with live or natural bait, taking a more relaxed and patient approach. Others use only artificial baits, and then there are those in the middle that will fish both. For many anglers, simply catching a fish, regardless of type of bait used, is fulfilling. But catching a fish on an artificial can sometimes provide a greater degree of satisfaction.

Most people are introduced to fishing using natural bait, and after all, it's highly productive and the presentation is usually easier to master than the techniques required for fishing artificials. So making the switch to artificials becomes difficult to lots of fishermen, but can be well worth the effort.

Throwing artificials is about confidence. Most anglers would argue that natural bait will always out-perform artificial bait, and there are many scenarios where this is true. However, many times a well presented artificial imitation can trump the real thing. An angler has to believe he or she can present an artificial bait in such a way that it mimics whatever forage a particular game fish may be feeding on. Can you hop a soft plastic jig along the bottom so that it looks and acts just like a shrimp trying to escape?

Gaining confidence in catching fish on artificials requires patience and persistence. When anglers first transition from natural bait to artificials, many throw an artificial a few times, and if not immediately successful give up. But if, for instance, you fish cold water with a "stop and go" retrieve with a suspending jerkbait along a shell bank you will eventually start to catch trout, at least on most days. Just stick with it and do not get discouraged.

Anglers who become proficient with artificials have a number of advantages. First of all, without the worry of trying to catch or purchase bait, you can spend more time actually fishing. Secondly, in a situation where the action is fast and furious, you can usually catch more fish in a shorter period of time because you do not have to re-bait.

It is often said "lures catch fishermen, not fish", but technological advances in lure manufacturing have greatly increased the productivity, if not physical appearance, of artificial baits. On the other hand, something as simple and non-descript as a spoon jigged vertically, a technique which requires no casting, can look enough like an injured baitfish to fool many a trophy fish.

For catch and release fishing, the benefits of using artificial baits cannot be ignored. Modifications, such as removing treble hooks, or using barbless hooks, can provide additional protection for both fish and fishermen. A common management strategy used in many freshwater trout streams that are designated as catch and release is to allow fishing with artificial lures only. The location of the hook wound is one of the most important factors that influence the survival of released fish, and artificial baits are more likely to hook fish around the outside of the jaw than in the throat or gut.

During wintertime in South Carolina, unless you purchase bait, catching it on your own can be a tough proposition. Without a source of bait, what do you do? Not going fishing shouldn't even be an option. If you find yourself without natural bait, consider challenging yourself to use an artificial. You might be surprised at how many fish you can catch once you learn the techniques, not to mention improving the chances of a successful release.